

Peterson (MN)	Scarborough	Terry
Peterson (PA)	Schaffer	Thomas
Petri	Schakowsky	Thompson (CA)
Phelps	Scott	Thompson (MS)
Pickering	Sensenbrenner	Thornberry
Pickett	Serrano	Thune
Pitts	Sessions	Thurman
Pombo	Shaw	Tiahrt
Pomeroy	Shays	Tierney
Porter	Sherman	Toomey
Portman	Sherwood	Towns
Price (NC)	Shinkus	Trafficant
Pryce (OH)	Shows	Turner
Quinn	Simpson	Udall (CO)
Rahall	Sisisky	Udall (NM)
Ramstad	Skeen	Upton
Regula	Skelton	Velazquez
Reynolds	Slaughter	Vento
Riley	Smith (NJ)	Visclosky
Rivers	Smith (TX)	Vitter
Rodriguez	Smith (WA)	Walden
Roemer	Snyder	Walsh
Rogan	Souder	Wamp
Rogers	Spence	Watt (NC)
Rohrabacher	Spratt	Watts (OK)
Ros-Lehtinen	Stabenow	Weiner
Rothman	Stark	Weldon (FL)
Roukema	Stearns	Weldon (PA)
Roybal-Allard	Stenholm	Weller
Royce	Strickland	Wexler
Rush	Stump	Weygand
Ryan (WI)	Stupak	Whitfield
Ryun (KS)	Sununu	Wicker
Sabo	Sweeney	Wilson
Salmon	Talent	Wolf
Sanchez	Tancred	Woolsey
Sanders	Tanner	Wu
Sandlin	Tauscher	Wynn
Sanford	Tauzin	Young (AK)
Sawyer	Taylor (MS)	Young (FL)
Saxton	Taylor (NC)	

NAYS—4

Bonior	Markey
Chenoweth-Hage	Paul

NOT VOTING—33

Ackerman	Hilliard	Payne
Barcia	Jones (NC)	Radanovich
Bass	LaHood	Rangel
Berman	Lee	Reyes
Collins	McCrery	Shadegg
Davis (VA)	McIntyre	Shuster
Dunn	Meehan	Smith (MI)
Ehrlich	Metcalfe	Waters
Ewing	Miller, Gary	Watkins
Fossella	Ortiz	Waxman
Hill (MT)	Oxley	Wise

□ 1426

So (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the concurrent resolution was agreed to.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 2420

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that my name be removed as cosponsor of H.R. 2420.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

APPOINTMENT OF CONFEREES ON H.R. 2112, MULTIDISTRICT, MULTIPARTY, MULTIFORUM TRIAL JURISDICTION ACT OF 1999

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on the Judiciary, I move to take from the Speaker's table the bill (H.R. 2112), to amend title 28, United States Code, to

allow a judge to whom a case is transferred to retain jurisdiction over certain multidistrict litigation cases for trial, and to provide for Federal jurisdiction of certain multiparty, multiforum civil actions, with a Senate amendment thereto, disagree to the Senate amendment, and agree to the conference asked by the Senate.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I support the motion to go to conference on the "Multidistrict, Multiparty, Multiforum Jurisdiction Act of 1999." I would like to begin by expressing thanks to Chairman COBLE and Ranking Member BERMAN as well as Representative SENSENBRENNER for their hard work and on this legislation which is being sought by the federal judiciary.

The most important provision of the bill is section 2 which overturns the recent Supreme Court decision in *Lexecon v. Milberg Weiss*, which held that a transferee court assigned to hear pretrial matters must remand all cases back for trial to the districts which they were originally filed, regardless of the views of the parties. This decision conflicts with some 30 years of practice by which transferee courts were able to retain such jurisdiction under Title 28. The Judicial Conference has testified that the previous process has worked well and served the interest of efficiency and judicial expedience.

There was a concern raised at the Subcommittee hearing that as originally drafted this provision would have gone far beyond simply permitting a transferee court to conduct a liability trial, but instead, allowed the court to also determine compensatory and punitive damages. This could be extremely inconvenient for harmed victims who would need to testify at the damages phase of the trial. As a result of discussions between the minority and majority, Rep. BERMAN successfully offered an amendment addressing this concern at the Full Committee markup.

Section 3 of the bill also expands federal court jurisdiction for single accidents involving at least 25 people having damages in excess of \$75,000 per claim and establishes new federal procedures in these limited cases for selection of venue, service of process, issuance of subpoenas and choice of law. The types of cases that would be included under this provision would be plane, train, bus, boat accidents and environmental spills, many of which are already brought in federal court. However, the provision would not apply to mass tort injuries that involve the same injury over and over again such as asbestos and breast implant cases.

While I traditionally oppose having federal courts decide state tort issues, and disfavor the expansion of the jurisdiction of the already-overloaded district courts, I have been willing to support this provision because it would only expand federal court jurisdiction in a very narrow class of actions and is being affirmatively sought for efficiency purposes by the federal courts. This is in stark contrast to the class action bill, which would completely federalize state law and was strongly opposed by the federal and state courts.

Section 3 was not included in the Senate passed bill, so I am hopeful that we can reach an accommodation which satisfies all of the in-

terested parties and allows the more important *Lexecon* provision to proceed. I would also note that the federal judiciary is also seeking to address a number of additional procedural matters, and I would hope that this body would take the time to enact these measures as well.

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I have no requests for time. I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the motion.

The previous question was ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER).

The motion was agreed to.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the Chair appoints the following conferees: Messrs. HYDE, SENSENBRENNER, COBLE, CONYERS, and BERMAN.

There was no objection.

EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF CONGRESS WITH RESPECT TO DEMOCRACY, FREE ELECTIONS, AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 169) expressing the sense of the House of Representatives with respect to democracy, free elections, and human rights in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. RES. 169

Whereas since the 1975 overthrow of the existing Royal Lao Government, Laos has been under the sole control of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party;

Whereas the present Lao constitution provides for a wide range of freedoms for the Lao people, including freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion, and Laos is a signatory to international conventions on genocide, racial discrimination, discrimination against women, war crimes, and rights of the child;

Whereas since July 1997, Laos has been a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), an organization which has set forth a vision for the year 2020 of a membership consisting of "open societies . . . governed with the consent and greater participation of the people" and "focus(ed) on the welfare and dignity of the human person and the good of the community";

Whereas, despite the Lao constitution and the membership by Laos in ASEAN, the Department of State's Laos Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998 states that the Lao Government's human rights record deteriorated and that the Lao Government restricts freedom of speech, assembly, association, and religion;

Whereas Amnesty International reports that serious problems persist in the Lao Government's performance in the area of human rights, including the continued detention of prisoners of conscience in extremely harsh conditions, and that in one case a prisoner of conscience held without trial since 1996 was chained and locked in wooden stocks for a period of 20 days;

Whereas Thongsouk Saysangkhi, a political prisoner sentenced to 14 years imprisonment in November 1992 after a grossly unfair

trial, died in February 1998 due to complications of diabetes after having been detained in harsh conditions with no medical facilities;

Whereas there are at least 5 identified, long-term political prisoners inside the Lao Government's prison system and the possibility of others whose names are not known;

Whereas there continue to be credible reports that some members of the Lao Government's security forces commit human rights abuses, including arbitrary detention and intimidation;

Whereas two United States citizens, Mr. Houa Ly, a resident of Appleton, Wisconsin, and Mr. Michael Vang, a resident of Fresno, California, were traveling along the border between Laos and Thailand on April 19, 1999;

Whereas the families of Messrs. Ly and Vang have been able to learn very little from the United States Government regarding the whereabouts or current circumstances of their loved ones; and

Whereas the Congress will not tolerate any unjustified arrest, abduction, imprisonment, disappearance, or other act of aggression against United States citizens by a foreign government; Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That—

(1) it is the sense of the House of Representatives that the present Government of Laos should—

(A) respect internationally recognized norms of human rights and the democratic freedoms of the people of Laos and honor in full its commitments to those norms and freedoms as embodied in its constitution and its participation in international organizations and agreements;

(B) issue a public statement specifically reaffirming its commitment to protecting religious freedom and other basic human rights;

(C) institute fully a democratic electoral system, with openly contested, free, and fair elections by secret ballot, beginning no later than the next National Assembly elections, currently scheduled to be held in 2002; and

(D) allow unrestricted access by international human rights monitors, including the International Committee of the Red Cross and Amnesty International, to all prisons and to all regions of the country to investigate alleged abuses of human rights, including those against the Hmong minority; and

(2) the House of Representatives—

(A) decries the disappearance of Houa Ly and Michael Vang, recognizing it as an incident worthy of congressional attention;

(B) urges the Lao Government to return Messrs. Ly and Vang, or their remains, to United States authorities and their families in America at once, if it is determined that the Lao Government is responsible for the disappearance of Messrs. Ly and Vang;

(C) warns the Lao Government of the serious consequences, including sanctions, of any unjustified arrest, abduction, imprisonment, disappearance, or other act of aggression against United States citizens; and

(D) urges the Department of State and other appropriate United States agencies to share the maximum amount of information regarding the disappearance of Messrs. Ly and Vang.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) and the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York (Mr. Gilman).

□ 1430

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members

may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H. Res. 169.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHIMKUS). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mr. GILMAN asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER), chairman, and the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS), ranking minority member of the Subcommittee on Asia and Pacific, for their excellent work on this resolution. Their tireless efforts on behalf of human rights, the rule of law, and democratic freedom are well known. The committee is especially grateful for the leadership of the gentleman from Nebraska (Chairman BEREUTER) in this matter.

I also wish to commend the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. GREEN), the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. VENTO), and the gentleman from California (Mr. RADANOVICH) for their work in support of this resolution. Without their efforts, the resolution would not have had the necessary support.

This past summer, Senator HELMS and I sent a staff delegation to Vientiane to speak with U.S. embassy staff regarding the disappearance of the two Hmong-Americans this past April on the border of Thailand and Laos.

The embassy staff informed the Staffdel of their efforts to locate the men and that the government of Laos was doing all that it could to be helpful. They also told our delegation that, to date, there was no solid information with regard to the whereabouts of the men or the circumstances that led to their disappearance. In fact, embassy staff added that there was no record or report that the men had even crossed into Laos. When the Staffdel left the country, it received a different assessment of the situation.

Given the current repression policies of the LPDR regime, it remains impossible to conduct secure research and meetings with dissidents or political opposition leaders inside Laos. It is impossible to receive information about conditions inside Laos from any sources that are not controlled by the government. There is no free press, and international human rights organizations are not permitted into the country.

Mr. Speaker, two Americans are unaccounted for, and it is unacceptable that this government or this committee not do anything that is possible to get to the bottom of the issue and to punish those who are responsible. Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H. Res. 169.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this resolution. First of all, I would like to commend the distinguished gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. VENTO) for taking the initiative in introducing this resolution. I also want to commend the gentleman from New York (Chairman GILMAN) and the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER), chairman of the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, and the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. GEJDENSON), ranking Democrat on the Committee on International Relations, for their support of this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, the human rights situation in Laos is deteriorating as we speak. According to Amnesty International, prisoners of conscience are held without trial for years, political prisoners die while in prison, and two Americans of Laotian extraction have disappeared.

The people of Laos do not enjoy the most elementary principles and practices of human rights. The resolution before us expresses the view of this body that the government of Laos must begin to respect human rights, institute a democratic electoral process, allow unrestricted access by international human rights organizations to all political prisoners.

I trust, Mr. Speaker, that passage of this resolution will raise the visibility internationally of the horrendous human rights situation in Laos and to encourage other countries to join us in challenging the government of Laos to behave in a civilized fashion.

I urge my colleagues to support H. Res. 169.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield such time as he may consume to the distinguished gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER), chairman of our Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific.

(Mr. BEREUTER asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H. Res. 169, addressing concerns related to democracy, free election, and human rights in Laos.

This resolution was introduced by the distinguished gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. VENTO). I appreciate the cooperation and support of the distinguished gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS), the ranking member of the Asian and Pacific Subcommittee, and especially the assistance of the distinguished gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN), chairman of the Committee on International Relations, and the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. GEJDENSON), ranking minority member, for their support for the members effort to secure a compromise during the committee mark-up. That was helpful to the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) and to me, and I know we both appreciate it.

We did our best to craft a resolution that combined the essence and important elements of several resolutions.

The people of Laos, especially Lao-Hmong, continue to experience gross violations of fundamental human rights at the hands of the Communist Lao regime. House Resolution 169 calls upon the Laotian government to respect international norms for the protection of human rights and democratic freedoms; issue a public statement reaffirming their commitment to protecting religious freedoms and basic human rights; fully institute a process of democracy with open, free, and fair elections; and allow access for international human rights monitors, including the International Committee of the Red Cross and Amnesty International to visit inside Lao prisons and to all regions within Laos to investigate allegations of human rights abuses. This Member, therefore, of course, urges approval of H. Res. 169.

The resolution was amended in committee, Mr. Speaker, to address the understandable concerns and energetic efforts of the gentleman from California (Mr. RADANOVICH) and the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. GREEN), who have constituents who have been missing after traveling near the Laos-Thailand border. I especially commend these two Members. The amended resolution expresses concern for these Lao-Americans' welfare and asks the U.S. Government to provide additional information it may have to obtain the knowledge of the whereabouts of these two individuals.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the distinguished gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN), chairman of the Committee on International Relations, the distinguished gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. GEJDENSON), the ranking Democrat, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. GREEN), the gentleman from California (Mr. RADANOVICH), the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS), and others who have assisted this Member in working cooperatively on this revised resolution to send a strong message to the government of Laos. We are doing it in a resolution originally introduced by the distinguished gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. VENTO) and I certainly commend him for his initiative.

This Member urges adoption of H. Res. 169.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. VENTO), author of this resolution.

(Mr. VENTO asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. VENTO. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from California for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise, of course, in strong support of this resolution, H. Res. 169, which I introduced earlier, and has numerous sponsors, including the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. KIND), the gentleman from Wisconsin

(Mr. GREEN), the gentleman from California (Mr. RADANOVICH), and the gentleman from California (Mr. ROHR-ABACHER).

I have really been gratified by the support and interest that the members of this committee, the Committee on International Relations, have demonstrated with regards to our concern in trying to represent our constituents.

Mr. Speaker, there are about 250,000 Hmong-Americans now that reside in the various States of California, Minnesota, Western Wisconsin, and throughout the Nation, but are concentrated in the areas of the authors of this resolution. But I must say that the response of the committee has been overwhelming and gratifying with regards to trying to respond to the justifiable concerns of these Hmong-Americans who have relatives and roots in southeast Asia.

As my colleagues know, the Hmongs were allies of the United States during the war in Vietnam. When we left, they were left really without their major supporter. As Laos was overrun by the Communist leadership, they, of course, were very much at risk of persecution. They fled to various refugee camps and out of the country. Those that remained in, I think there was understandably great concern as to what their treatment has been and will be in the future.

Of course, even now, as we are closing the last refugee camps in Thailand, many of them are choosing, obviously, to go home back to Laos, I think there are great concerns in the context of what is happening within their legal system, within their prisons, with the lack of human rights.

Obviously, we have relied greatly on the U.N. High Commissioner on Refugees to monitor what is happening to refugees in the camps in Thailand and to what happens during resettlement. But they have really a very, very, very narrow focus. The fact of the matter is the international monitoring groups, whether it is Amnesty International or the Red Cross or many other objective sources, simply have no opportunity to go into Laos and to report what the treatment is of minorities such as the Hmong that have returned to Laos or have persisted in being there.

The concern here, of course, results in mistreatment of prisoners, which is articulated in my detailed statement, where certainly the prisons and political prisoners that are present are being abused.

The disappearance of, in fact, Hmong-Americans that were making inquiries that were on the border someplace between Laos and Thailand, and they have simply disappeared, and that has been for almost a half year now, and we still have not had cooperation from the Laotian government.

Furthermore, of course, the repressive suppression of various protestors that have occurred in Laos, again which is articulated, and I have made the repeated statement that the ad-

ministration and the small diplomatic force or corps that they have there simply have not received the type of cooperation so that they can make definitive judgments about what the conduct and circumstances of the people of Laos.

Yet, of course, today Laos seeks freer trade with the United States, chooses or wants to be part of the family of Nations. But I think that this resolution and the concern that is being expressed by those of us that obviously represent Hmong-Americans and that represent, really, the values that we stand for are, I think, serving notice that we will not have normal trade relations; we will not have normal diplomatic relations until, in fact, they begin to conduct themselves in line with proximate values concerning human rights, free elections, nonpersecution, freedom in prisons.

I think the best antiseptic for this problem, of course, is to have the internationally recognized groups as observers in this country.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Lao-Hmong community in my district of St. Paul, MN, across the Nation and inside of Laos, I rise in strong support of my Laos human rights resolution. I would like to thank Congressman BE-REUTER, Congressman GEJDENSON, Congressman LANTOS, and Chairman GILMAN for their support throughout the committee process with the special assistance to improve the language and recognizing the importance of my resolution. By its action, the committee has placed Congress on record against the human rights abuses of the Lao Government. By focusing justifiably on the continued reports of abuses against the Lao-Hmong, H. Res. 169 is an important first step to bring international pressure on the Lao government to implement basic democratic reforms. I am pleased that H. Res. 169 has also been amended to incorporate significant recent events and important questions surrounding the disappearance of two Hmong-American citizens; Michael Vang and Houa Ly, whose daughter resides in my district in St. Paul, MN. On April 9, 1999, these two Hmong-Americans with United States passports and appropriate papers disappeared along the Thailand-Laos border. According to eyewitnesses, men thought to be Laotian security officials abducted Michael Vang and Houa Ly. The Lao Government continues to deny knowledge of the whereabouts of Mr. Vang and Mr. Ly or the role of government security forces in abducting them. Unfortunately, after 6 months of investigation, there are no answers to this incident. If Laos has nothing to hide, then they should allow complete access for capable and credible international human rights monitors inside of Laos to investigate the disappearances of Mr. Vang and Mr. Ly. In addition, the amended version demands the cooperation of the Laotian Government in the ongoing investigation of this matter. This matter was the specific focus of an ad-hoc hearing organized by the Congressional Human Rights Caucus in October. This important hearing highlighted the very serious nature of the disappearance, unanswered questions and lack of good faith cooperation from the Laotian Government. I have cosponsored this as a separate resolution recently and credit Rep. GREEN and Rep. RADANOVICH for their initiative.

The Vento Resolution calls upon the government of Laos to hold free and open elections, respect basic human rights for the Lao people and provide access to international human right monitors to investigate alleged abuses of human rights, including abuses against the Lao-Hmong. Human rights abuses by the government of Laos continue to be an international concern. The people of Laos, especially the Lao-Hmong, continue to experience gross violations of fundamental human rights at the hands of the Communist Lao regime. In many cases this oppression amounts to retribution against the Lao-Hmong who fought alongside United States troops over 20 years ago. While our forces have long since pulled out of Southeast Asia, the plight and sacrifices of our loyal friends and allies inside of Laos must not be forgotten.

Earlier this month, Thai news reports suggest that the Communist Lao Government arrested up to 31 people in late October for peacefully protesting against government failure to tackle mounting economic problems and demanding free elections. Not surprisingly, the Laotian Government denies such reports. Sources from the Bangkok newspaper the Nation reported that the protesters included students and teachers from the Dong Dok National University and the Vientiane High School. This clearly demonstrates anew that the Government of Laos has not committed itself to democratic reform and human rights, punctuating the importance of my resolution with this recent act.

Although the Laotian Communist Government does not allow independent human rights observers in Laos, there are numerous credible reports of persecution and abuse of the Lao people. Lao-Hmong families are threatened daily by the Communist regime, and many Hmong are reported to have been imprisoned, tortured, and even killed. According to the State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1998, the Laotian Government severely restricts the freedoms of speech, assembly and religion. Amnesty International also reports gross human rights violations including the detention of political prisoners and the treatment of such prisoners in a manner that is degrading, abusive, and inhumane. In February of last year, one political prisoner, Thongsouk Saysanghi, died in a remote prison camp in Laos. In addition, other political prisoners still remain in Laotian prisons. Amnesty International has made repeated appeals to the Lao authorities to improve the conditions of detention of the prisoners. These appeals have been ignored, resulting in the tragic death of Thongsouk. This demonstrates not only the Lao Government's complete lack of care for its political prisoners, but its contempt for the opinion of the international community.

Specifically, my resolution calls upon the Laotian Government to respect international norms for the protection of human rights and democratic freedoms; issue a public statement reaffirming its commitment to protecting religious freedoms and basic human rights; fully institute a process of democracy with open, free, and fair elections; and allow access to international human rights monitors, including the International Committee of the Red Cross and Amnesty International, inside Lao prisons and to all regions within Laos to investigate allegations of human rights abuse, especially against the Lao-Hmong. Extreme sacrifices

were made by the Lao-Hmong in the jungles and in the highlands, whether in uniform or in the common clothing of the laborer. Thousands of U.S. soldier's lives were spared because of the Lao-Hmong patriot's support and help as they fought alongside the United States forces in the Vietnam war. For their efforts, the Lao-Hmong deserve our thanks, our refuge and shelter and certainly fundamental human rights, freedoms, and fair elections in Laos. This resolution is an important statement concerning the contemporary and unsatisfactory status of human rights in Laos today and is a further step toward promoting and implementing improved human rights standards and democracy in Laos. However, much more work needs to be done. We certainly have a moral obligation to the people of Laos to remain diligent in the effort to restore their human rights. I urge all my colleagues to support this important human rights resolution.

So with that said, Mr. Speaker, I include for the RECORD a document or letter that I received from the State Department which tries to go through a chronology of what has happened with regards to the investigations concerning the disappearance of these two Hmong-Americans who have relatives in our communities, as follows:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, DC, November 3, 1999.

Hon. BRUCE VENTO,
House of Representatives.

DEAR MR. VENTO: Thank you for your letter of October 13 to Secretary Albright in which you inquire about the two missing U.S. citizens believed to be in Laos.

Let me assure you that the State Department is committed to resolving this case, and that it is an issue of great importance in our bilateral relationship with Laos. The welfare of American citizens overseas is a highest priority for us, and this case has received our full attention since the disappearances were first reported in May.

The FBI-led investigation is ongoing, and no conclusions have yet been reached. Our missions in Laos and Thailand are pursuing all credible leads in their efforts to resolve the disappearance of these two U.S. citizens. The region in which the men were last reported is marked by rugged terrain and poor infrastructure. There have also been extended delays in Lao government approvals of access to the area. Incomplete and contradictory reports regarding their disappearance have further complicated the investigation.

At every opportunity, U.S. officials raise this case with Lao officials to press for their cooperation in ascertaining the whereabouts of these two U.S. citizens. We have not been completely satisfied with the cooperation from the Lao government, which has been slow to respond to our requests for access to the area and has tried to place restrictions on our investigators. Nevertheless, the Department of State and the FBI believe that cooperation with the Lao is necessary to conduct this investigation. Laos is a sovereign country, and we need the Lao government's assistance to gain access to certain areas and officials.

Regarding the release of classified materials relevant to this case, we have received a Freedom of Information Act request from the Ly family via the office of Representative Mark Green (R-WI). While the request involves various agencies and hence may be time consuming, we are doing our best to process it as expeditiously as possible. In the meantime, we are enclosing a brief chronology outlining the actions we have taken

during the investigation of this case. For more details on the investigation itself, we would refer you to the FBI.

Lastly, you may be interested to know that Ambassador Chamberlin left Laos in June of this year and no longer serves as our Ambassador there. A new Ambassador has not yet been named.

We hope that this information is useful to you. Please feel free to contact us again if we may be of further assistance on this or any other issue.

Sincerely,

BARBARA LARKIN,
Assistant Secretary Legislative Affairs.

Enclosure: Chronology of events.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS—MISSING AMERICAN CITIZENS IN LAOS

May 1999—present, updated: 10/27/99a

04 May 1999: Two individuals report to the American Consulate in Chiang Mai, Thailand that two U.S. citizens crossed into Laos at Ban Houayxay, Bokeo province, on April 19, 1999 and had not yet returned or had contact with their families. U.S. Consulate in Chiang Mai confirms the two missing are U.S. citizens. This information is relayed to the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane.

05 May 1999: U.S. consular staff in Vientiane repeatedly attempt to contact officials in Ban Houayxay and also ask Lao immigration officials to obtain more information about the two citizens.

06 May 1999: U.S. consular staff in Vientiane and Chiang Mai continue to investigate the case, as details remain sketchy.

07 May 1999: Embassy Vientiane sends an urgent diplomatic note seeking consular access and an explanation of the situation to the Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). A meeting with Lao Ministry of Interior officials is held that day; MFA officials schedule appointments for the next working day, Monday, May 10.

10 May 1999: U.S. Ambassador in Vientiane meets with Minister to the President's Office to express strong USG concern and again press for consular access. Concurrently, U.S. Acting Deputy Chief of Mission meets with Lao MFA officials, and U.S. consular officer meets with Lao officials from the Consular Affairs Department to further underscore the USG's need for a prompt reply. None of the inquiries results in any new information.

12 May 1999: U.S. Ambassador meets with Deputy Foreign Minister to press the Lao government strongly for an investigation of the case. In Washington, D.C., State Department desk officer for Laos meets with wives of the two citizens as well as Dr. Pobzeb of the Lao Human Rights Council. Pobzeb presents a copy of a letter sent to Congress by the two men who first reported the disappearance, alleging that the Laotian government has imprisoned one and killed the other of the two missing U.S. citizens.

13 May 1999: Embassy Vientiane receives copy of the same letter and presents it to the MFA. Senators Feinstein, Boxer, Kohl and Feingold send a letter about Vang and Ly to A/S for Consular Affairs Mary Ryan.

14 May 1999:

Lao government officials report to the U.S. Embassy that it has no record of entry for the two U.S. citizens into Laos.

East Asia and Pacific Affairs Deputy Assistant Secretary calls in the Lao Ambassador to the U.S. to continue to press our concerns and demand an immediate explanation and investigation. He also notes Congressional interest in this case. The Lao Ambassador cites the difficulty of investigating the case because the two did not cross into Laos at an international checkpoint.

17 May 1999: Embassy Vientiane receives a copy of Congressional letter to the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs on this matter. U.S. Ambassador continues to raise the case with Lao officials.

18 May 1999: U.S. Ambassador in Vientiane calls on Lao Vice Prime Minister to demand immediate consular access, reiterating the Lao government's responsibility under the Vienna Convention. Ambassador also states that the USG holds the Lao government accountable for the two citizens.

19 May 1999: Lao MFA officials inform Ambassador that the Deputy Prime Minister ordered officials in Bokeo to conduct an investigation. A letter about Ly and Vang is sent to the Secretary from Representatives Gilman, Green, McKinney, Smith and Kind.

21 May 1999: State Department officials meet again with Dr. Pobzeb of the Lao Human Rights Council about this case.

22-23 May 1999: U.S. officials in Chiang Mai continue to investigate the case.

25 May 1999: U.S. officials in Vientiane inquire again with Lao MFA officials about any progress on the case.

26-27 May 1999: United States Government efforts to obtain information about this case continue in Chiang Mai and Vientiane.

28 May 1999: Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Mary Ryan calls in the Lao Ambassador to the United States to emphasize the importance the United States places on the safety and welfare of welfare of United States citizens overseas and to express concern about the lack of information. The Ambassador pledges his government's cooperation, but provides no new information.

31 May 1999: United States Ambassador in Vientiane meets with Lao Prime Minister to underscore the importance of resolving this case.

1-3 June 1999: U.S. investigation efforts continue.

4 June 1999: Lao authorities inform Embassy in Vientiane that they have determined that the two Americans did not request visas to enter Laos, and based on their investigation, there was no evidence about the Americans' whereabouts in Laos, United States Ambassador proposes to Lao Deputy Foreign Minister a joint United States-Lao investigation of the case; United States Embassy in Vientiane sends a follow up diplomatic note.

7 June 1999: United States Ambassador in Vientiane requests a meeting with Lao authorities to express dissatisfaction with their investigation conclusions.

8 June 1999: United States Ambassador in Vientiane meets with MFA Permanent Secretary to object formally to the Lao response on the welfare and whereabouts of Vang and Ly. Ambassador also presses Lao to agree to a joint United States-Lao investigation.

10 June 1999: United States Ambassador calls on Lao Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister who indicates preliminary support for a joint United States-Lao investigation of the case. United States Ambassador urges Lao to make an official reply.

11 June 1999: United States officials in Vientiane postpone plans for travel to Bokeo to wait and see if the Lao will agree to a joint investigation.

14 June 1999: Department of State officers from the East Asia and Pacific Affairs Bureau brief Congressional staffers (hosted by office of Representative Ron Kind) on status of missing Amcits case.

16 June 1999: Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs Europe and Americas Department Acting Director General informs United States charge that the Lao Government agrees to the United States proposal to form a joint investigation team to look into the case of the missing Americans. Lao representation on the team is still being decided by the ministries concerned. The United States side will most likely include our Legal Attache or Assistant Legal Attache from Embassy Bangkok, plus a consular officer, political officer and translator from Vientiane.

17-20 June 1999: Preparations for joint investigation get underway.

21 June 1999: Lao MFA Americas Department Director General calls in United States Charge to deliver a diplomatic note formally agreeing to the United States proposal for a joint, cooperative investigative effort to resolve the case. He requested a proposed plan of action and noted local authorities would also need to be consulted.

22 June 1999: United States Embassy in Vientiane draws up a draft plan, which the joint team would use for the purpose of planning and coordinating investigative efforts. Embassy confers with the State Department on the draft plan.

23 June 1999: United States Embassy in Vientiane receives concurrence for the plan from the State Department. Embassy officials present the draft plan to the Lao Government.

24 June 1999: Lao MFA calls United States Embassy to schedule a meeting for the joint investigative team. Assistant Legal Attache from United States Embassy Bangkok arrives in Vientiane.

25 June 1999: United States-Lao Joint investigative team meets for the first time and discusses investigative plan. Plans for departure tentatively set for June 29.

26-29 June 1999: United States Embassy and Lao officials make travel arrangements.

29 June 1999: U.S. Consul General in Chiang Mai meets with Dr. Vang Pobzeb of the Lao Human Rights Council, who was visiting Thailand.

30 June 1999: U.S.-Lao joint investigative team departs for Bokeo via an overnight stay in Luang Prabang.

01 July 1999: U.S.-Lao joint team arrives in Ban Huay Xai, Bokeo province. (Note: flight cancellations are responsible for the delayed arrival.)

02-05 July 1999: U.S.-Lao joint team conducts investigation in Ban Huay Xai.

06 July 1999: U.S.-Lao joint team returns to Vientiane. The team suggests following up leads in Thailand.

07 July 1999: Staffers from HIRC and SFRC meet with senior Lao officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior to review progress in the investigation and to reiterate USG concern.

07-13 July 1999: Assistant Legal Attache in Bangkok heads up continuation of investigation in Thailand.

14 July 1999: Assistant Legal Attache travels to Chiang Mai to continue investigative efforts and to interview witnesses.

16 July 1999:

U.S. Charge in Vientiane raises the case with the Lao MFA's Permanent Secretary, who acknowledges the importance of the case and promises to follow up.

DIA briefs HIRC/SFRC staffers.

19 July 1999: U.S. Embassy Vientiane task force meets to review investigative efforts and to consider next steps.

20 July 1999: U.S. Embassy Vientiane contacts head of Lao team for joint investigation for a meeting of the joint team to review findings and discuss next steps (per original investigation plan). Head of Lao team responds following day that other members of joint team are out of town; a meeting day may be possible after Buddhist Lent (July 28).

21 July 1999:

During her initial call on MFA America's Department Director General, newly arrived U.S. Charge again reiterates Embassy concern about this case.

Embassy formally requests a meeting of the U.S.-Lao joint investigative team.

29 July 1999: Congressman Mark Green of Wisconsin sends a letter to the Department of State requesting a meeting with members of Houa Ly's family.

30 July 1999:

U.S. Charge in Vientiane calls on MFA's Americas Department Acting Director General (Amphone) and repeats request for follow-up meeting of U.S.-Lao joint investigative team.

U.S. Embassy sends diplomatic note to MFA requesting a follow-on visit for Assistant Legal Attache to continue field investigations based on information developed from recent inquiries conducted in Thailand.

DIA briefs Representative Mark Green and various staffers.

Lao Human Rights Council, Inc. provides Department of State with its "Reports on the Fact-Finding Mission to Thailand, June 17-July 8" on the missing Americans.

04 August 1999: EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary Skip Boyce (joined by desk officer and Consular Affairs representative) brief Congressman Mark Green (R-WI).

05 August 1999: U.S. Embassy official in Vientiane meets with Director for Consular Affairs at the Lao MFA to discuss meeting of joint investigative team.

05-06 August 1999: Investigative efforts in Bangkok continue.

09 August 1999: EAP Assistant Secretary Stanley Roth calls in Lao Ambassador to express our dissatisfaction with the pace of the investigation.

18 August 1999: Lao MFA, Director of Consular Affairs calls in U.S. consular officer to discuss the case.

19 August 1999: Lao MFA member of the joint team calls Embassy to confirm meeting of the joint investigative team on August 26. Lao MFA member also says that Lao Ministry of Interior is working on assistant legal attache's follow up visit to Ban Huay Xai.

20 August 1999: Embassy task force convenes to discuss strategy for August 26 meeting. Embassy requests Department's input.

23 August 1999: State Department follows up with Lao Embassy to reiterate the need for quick approval of assistant legal attache's visit to the region.

24-25 August 1999: U.S. officials in Chiang Mai, Thailand consult with Thai officials near the Lao border, but discover no new information.

26 August 1999: Joint U.S.-Lao investigation team meets in Vientiane. The Lao request a list of places to visit and people to interview in Ban Huay Xai.

27 August 1999: Interagency group meets at the State Department to discuss next steps.

01 September 1999: Embassy officials in Vientiane submit a diplomatic note to Lao officials with a list of locations and people to see in Ban Huay Xai. State Department officials try to facilitate FBI briefings for the families of the two missing Americans.

02 September 1999: Senator Shelby, during a visit to Laos, presses the Lao Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister to do everything possible to resolve this case. The Foreign Minister replied that the Lao government has no information the two entered Laos, but would continue its investigative efforts.

07 September 1999: Congressman Mark Green writes to the State Department to request the release of classified and other documents pertaining to Mr. Ly to the Ly family.

09 September 1999: State Department officials meet with Dr. Vang Pobzeb of the Lao Human Rights Council to discuss this case.

13 September 1999: Article appears in Bangkok Post entitled, "Cash-toting, armed U.S. men missing."

17 September 1999: U.S. consular officer in Vientiane meets with Lao MFA Consular Affairs Director to discuss Embassy's outstanding request for second visit to Bokeo. Lao officials apologizes for delay in responding to Embassy's August 30 dip note and promises to respond soon in writing.

20 September 1999: State Department official calls the Lao Embassy to request their assistance in expediting the request for travel to Bokeo.

23 September 1999: Article appears in the Fresno Bee entitled, "Protesters seek return of Fresno man."

27 September 1999: EAP A/S Stanley Roth meets with Lao FM during the UNGA bilateral meeting to discuss this case. Embassy in Vientiane attempts to contact Consular Affairs chief at MFA to press for a response to our diplomatic note requesting the second trip to Huay Xai.

01 October 1999: U.S. Charge in Vientiane calls on MFA Americas Acting DG to press for a quick decision on the joint investigation team's proposed visit to Huay Xai.

04 October 1999: Visiting Office Director for Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam meets with Permanent Secretary of the Lao MFA and Director-General of the Americas department to press for a second trip to Huay Xai.

07 October 1999: Embassy officials in Vientiane consult with Thai Embassy officials in Laos about this case. The Thai officials express their concern and agree to continue to work with the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok.

08 October 1999: Lao MFA official calls in consular officer to discuss the trip to Huay Xai. The GOL approved a second joint field investigation with certain conditions.

12 October 1999: Embassy Vientiane's task force meets to discuss the Lao government's response.

13 October 1999: Embassy Vientiane consults with legat's office in Bangkok and requests Department's input before responding to Lao government. Department officials meet with family members at a meeting hosted by Rep. Green.

14 October 1999: Department relays to Lao Embassy our concerns about continued GOL cooperation.

15 October 1999: Department instructs Embassy in Vientiane to impress upon the Lao the need to set a date as soon as possible.

18 October 1999: Embassy requests a meeting of the joint investigative team.

22 October 1999: Embassy officials and Legal Attache from Bangkok meet with Lao MFA Director of Consular Affairs to discuss second field trip to Huay Xai. The Lao official does not commit to a date and requests a second meeting, to include more Lao officials, for October 27, the next working day after the two day Lao holiday.

27 October 1999: Embassy officials meet with Lao officials to discuss issues of access and conditions. The team is able to resolve most issues. The joint team is set to depart for Huay Xai November 14 or 15.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. GREEN).

Mr. GREEN of Wisconsin. Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking the gentleman from New York (Chairman GILMAN) for his help and leadership and support on this issue. Of course, I need to thank the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. VENTO) for his work authoring this resolution. I think it is an important statement.

I also want to thank the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER). Without his hard work and leadership on this, we would not have gotten to this point. He has done a tremendous job.

Finally, I thank the gentleman from California (Mr. RADANOVICH) who was my partner in developing some of the language that was added in committee, and he deserves the gratitude of all of

us who are concerned about human rights.

My concern, my interest in this resolution does, in fact, grow out of the plight of constituents of mine. Back some months ago, April, two American citizens, Mr. Houa Ly, who was from Appleton, Wisconsin, and Mr. Michael Vang, who was from the district of the gentleman from Fresno, California (Mr. RADANOVICH), were traveling along the Thai-Lao border, and they disappeared.

Eye witnesses suggest that they were last seen in the company of representatives of the Lao government on a river boat. All available evidence, whether it be those eye witnesses or the congressional research mission that the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) referred to, or relevant nongovernmental organizations, points, in fact, to the involvement of the Lao government in the disappearance of these two citizens.

Since April, unfortunately, precious little seems to have happened. The State Department has entered into a joint investigation with the Lao government in this matter. The problem is, of course, that is the very government that is likely to have been involved in the disappearance.

I would suggest to my colleagues that it should be no wonder that little has happened in that investigation if, in fact, the Lao government was involved. Let us not forget the Lao government is a government with an atrocious human rights record.

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Is it any wonder that the investigation really has not gotten very far?

The families involved have suffered 7 months of near silence. They have been told almost nothing about their loved ones. Not only nothing from the Lao government, which I guess is to be expected given its treatment of human rights issues, but also nothing, unfortunately, or almost nothing from our own government, from our own State Department, from America. It has gotten so bad that these families have had to file a Freedom of Information Act request to get any information at all, even declassified information, and they are still waiting, weeks later, for a formal response to their request. I hate to say it, but I cannot help but wonder if these U.S. citizens were not of Hmong descent but perhaps of another ethnic group or race, perhaps we would be taking this issue more seriously.

Why are we bringing this resolution forward? People often ask why it is that we make such statements of policy here in the House. Well, they are, in fact, that, statements of policy. They are designed to send a public message. So here goes. Here is a public message: To the government of Laos, we say that these men are U.S. citizens. Any hope of an improved relationship with this country, in my view, must ride upon the Laos government's willingness to answer questions and to help us determine the whereabouts of these citizens.

To our own State Department: Again, these men are U.S. citizens. Not second-class citizens, but full U.S. citizens. Show their families that citizenship means something; give them the information and give them the help which they are entitled to.

Finally, to the families of Houa Ly and Michael Vang, who are U.S. citizens, we want them to know that they are not forgotten. It may seem like precious little consolation; but here today, before the public, we want them to know that they are not forgotten. We are remembering; we will push forward; and we will get some answers.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. KIND), who has become one of the most effective foreign affairs spokesmen on our side.

(Mr. KIND asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. KIND. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time, and I rise in strong support of this resolution and commend my friend, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. VENTO), for authoring it. This resolution expresses the sense of the House of Representatives with respect to democracy, free elections, and human rights in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a one-party Communist state ruled by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. The Lao People's Revolutionary Party exercises absolute control over the state and its institutions. Sadly, the Lao government is intolerant of political diversity and the existence of political and religious groups or organizations with differing viewpoints.

Independent human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, have testified before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus that the Lao government bars information from flowing out of the country. In fact, foreign journalists are assigned "mind-ers" by the Lao government security services to monitor their movements and activities. This type of activity demonstrates the Lao government's complete control over all institutions, including the media.

Mr. Speaker, Laos is the homeland of more than 3,000 of my district's constituents. In fact, the State of Wisconsin has the second largest Hmong population in the Nation. The Hmong assisted our Nation in our fight against Communist forces in southeast Asia. Since first coming to the United States in 1975, the Hmong community has contributed to our Nation's economic prosperity and are dependable hard-working members of Wisconsin's work force.

The Hmong are now raising a new generation of American citizens. Despite this, Hmong-Americans are concerned about the continued human rights violations that are practiced by the Lao government on Lao Hmong, many of whom are members of their

own family. While the Communist Lao government does not allow independent human rights observers in Laos, there are numerous reports of persecution and abuse of the Lao people. Reports indicate that Lao Hmong families are often threatened; and many Hmong are reported to have been in prison, tortured, and even killed.

In fact, last April, two Hmong Americans with U.S. passports and appropriate papers disappeared along the Lao-Thailand border. According to American eyewitnesses, men thought to be Laotian security officials abducted the men. After more than 7 months of joint investigation by the U.S. State Department, U.S. Embassies in Laos and Thailand, the Lao and Thai government, not a trace of the men have been found. This is intolerable and unacceptable. It is imperative that all information regarding the disappearance, whereabouts and current circumstances of these two men are expeditiously released and made public to the men's families and to this Congress.

Moreover, with the return of approximately 1200 Hmong to their native Laos from the Ban Napho refugee camp in Thailand, we in Congress need to ensure that these people are not subjected to retribution or oppression by the hands of the Lao government. Passage of this resolution will send such a message.

Mr. Speaker, this resolution is an important first step toward promoting and implementing better human rights standards and, hopefully, democracy in Laos. The Hmong were America's friends during our time of need, we must not forget their sacrifices today.

This body and this Nation has a moral obligation to send a clear message that we are interested in the restoration and the respect of human rights for the people of Laos and we will not tolerate business as usual by the Lao government. I would encourage all my colleagues to support this very important resolution.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. VENTO).

Mr. VENTO. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the ranking member yielding this time to me.

I just wanted to thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) for his outstanding interest and support in this and the chairman of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER), who provided extraordinary cooperation, I am deeply grateful, as well as, of course, our Ranking Members, the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) of the subcommittee, and the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. GEJDESON), our Ranking Member. I very much appreciate the cooperation.

I think it should be borne in mind that but for these Hmong Americans many other U.S. lives would have been lost during the Vietnam conflict, and I

think it behooves us to, in fact, step up and to speak to the human rights of the people that remain in Southeast Asia, especially these Hmong Americans who are in Laos and who are suffering under these consequences. These promises on paper do not mean anything unless they are translated into reality in terms of what is happening to the people, the minorities, in Laos.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. VENTO) for his supportive and kind remarks.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BALLENGER). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 169, as amended.

The question was taken.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

EXPRESSING UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARD THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 165) expressing United States policy toward the Slovak Republic.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 165

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring).

SECTION 1. FINDINGS.

The Congress finds the following:

(1) Elections held in May 1999 brought the first ever popularly elected President of the Slovak Republic to office and demonstrated the commitment of the Slovak people to full economic reforms, democratic government, and western ideals.

(2) The parliamentary elections held in September 1998 brought to office a coalition government in the Slovak Republic which has shown its commitment to economic reforms through economic austerity measures approved in May 1999, increased foreign investments through privatization of markets that were formerly state controlled, and discipline in government and currency policies.

(3) The Government of the Slovak Republic formed after the elections of September 1998 has renewed efforts to ensure the proper treatment of its citizens, regardless of ethnic background, including those of ethnic Hungarian background through the placement of three ethnic Hungarians in the cabinet of the Government (including the Deputy Premier for Human and Minority Rights), and through the passage of the Minority Language Use Act on July 10, 1999, in accordance with European Union guidelines, which will take effect on September 1, 1999, to protect the rights of all citizens.

(4) The Government of the Slovak Republic has made Slovakia's integration into pan-

European and trans-Atlantic institutions, including the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the highest foreign policy priority, and through active participation with the Visegrad Four, the Slovak Republic has undertaken efforts to promote stability in the region.

(5) The Government of the Slovak Republic has stated its continuing support for the mission of NATO in supporting democratization and stability across Europe, and the Government demonstrated its commitment to these principles by fully cooperating with NATO during the recent conflict in Kosovo, allowing NATO full access to Slovak airspace, highways, and railways.

(6) The Slovak Republic subsequently provided military engineers to assist the peacekeeping force of NATO in Kosovo (KFOR), approved a \$2,000,000 humanitarian aid package for Kosovo, and housed over 100 refugees from the conflict.

(7) The Government of the Slovak Republic has continually worked to retain civilian control of its military through participation with NATO forces and has been an active participant in the Partnership-for-Peace program.

(8) The Slovak Republic has provided military personnel for participation in and support of multinational peacekeeping operations such as the United Nations operations in Rwanda and Liberia.

SEC. 2. POLICY TOWARD THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC.

It is the policy of the United States—

(1) to promote the development in the Slovak Republic of a market-based economy and a democratic government that respects the rights of all of its citizens, regardless of ethnic background; and

(2) to support the eventual integration of the Slovak Republic into pan-European and trans-Atlantic economic and security institutions.

SEC. 3. SENSE OF THE CONGRESS.

It is the sense of the Congress that—

(1) the Government of the Slovak Republic formed after the elections of September 1998 is to be commended—

(A) for its efforts to address the issue of proper treatment of its citizens, regardless of ethnic background, particularly those of ethnic Hungarian background;

(B) for its efforts to improve the economic situation in the Slovak Republic and for its efforts to accelerate the privatization of state-owned enterprises in a fair and transparent process; and

(C) for its support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the recent conflict in Kosovo;

(2) the Government of the Slovak Republic should continue to implement programs that may qualify the Slovak Republic for entrance into the European Union and NATO and is to be commended for its continued support of the NATO effort to ensure stability and democratization across Europe; and

(3) the United States should support efforts for the eventual integration of the Slovak Republic into pan-European and trans-Atlantic institutions and should view such integration as an important factor in consolidating democratic government and economic stability in the Slovak Republic.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) and the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members